

## Mentorship and supervision in Ugandan higher education institutions universities: challenges and prospects

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### ABSTRACT

The paper examined the current status of Mentorship and Supervision in Ugandan higher education institutions and universities and considered the ideal model of Mentorship and Supervision for a typical higher education institution and university. The paper then depicted the importance of Mentorship as one way of fostering effective and efficient service delivery at higher education institutions and universities. The ideal higher education institution or university should facilitate personal and professional development enabling individuals and groups to achieve their full potential. Mentoring is a dynamic way of facilitating such development. The higher education institution or university formally requires all its faculties to make arrangements for the mentoring of its newly appointed staff and newly admitted students. Mentoring at a higher education institution or university entails long time passing on of support, guidance and advice. The underlying factor in mentoring in the work place is that the more experienced colleague uses their greater knowledge and understanding of the work or workplace to support the development of a more junior or inexperienced member of staff. The Mentoring and Supervision discussed in this paper has been considered through the three strands of the mandate of the higher education institution which are: teaching, research and community service. Data concerning Mentorship and Supervision was obtained from a meta- analysis of documents such as reports, journals, articles and books concerning Mentorship in the Ugandan higher education institutions and universities. The overall mean score for the influence was 2.5 which indicates a low influence of mentorship and supervision on the career. The paper underscored the status of Mentorship and Supervision at the Ugandan higher education institutions and universities as low. Lastly, pointed out the challenges faced in mentoring staff and students and charted the way forward in the mentoring process at Ugandan higher education institutions and universities. Therefore, the study recommends that supervisors-supervisees relationships be improved to achieve higher graduate study completion rates.

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### Introduction

The paramount role of Mentoring and Supervision cannot be over emphasized around the world. The duo cannot be separated from each other and it has been embedded in our daily life activities. It also emanated from socialization processes of human life. Mentoring and supervision moderate human attitude, behaviour and career life of every human being.

The University as an institution that signify the citadel of learning has rules and regulations that streamline its teaching, learning, research, and community services. This paper is written optimistically, with the goal of motivating academics, where possible, to become active in supervising research candidates and to encourage budding research supervisors to become mentors. Academics assuming the mentoring and supervision role should be trusted and valued advisors, with integrity, taking a step beyond simply directing people and activities, which is the common definition of supervision. They should add value to the mentee and supervisee career life improvement and not nagging on supervisee that the supervisor is a king. The mentors and supervisors do not wish to see mentees and supervisees in their houses, want them to buy tea for them, do not wish to receive telephone calls in the morning and actions test the mentees' patience by use of abusive language.

### **Background**

Over the past decade, in the academic profession, research was carried out predominantly by determined field practitioners and teaching staff members with little or no research training. The situation is improving, including greatly improved research funding opportunities (Murphy, et. al, 2008). For decades, authors from within the academic profession have called for the development of formally trained researchers in different fields to consolidate the past problem in mentoring and supervision (Haldeman, et. al,2002). One factor in this change is that as new pedagogical methods of teaching institutions around the world are being created within existing universities, the opportunities for research training and mentorship are increasing. However, even among calls for more research funding and the development of a research culture, little is seen in the literature about integrative research with universities or about training Masters, PhD for the future, although there are few exceptions towards this goal.

### **Literature Search Methods and Strategy Used**

The researchers developed literature review methods that included: inclusion and exclusion criteria to identify potentially relevant articles, search strategies to retrieve articles and review of theses and dissertations that provided data on Mentorship and Supervision at the public universities of Makerere, Kyambogo, Mbarara and Gulu in Uganda.

### **Database Used**

Data were obtained from meta-analysis of documents such as reports, journals, articles and books concerning mentorship and supervision.

### **Inclusion /Exclusion Criteria**

To be considered an article that provided evidence regarding the status of Mentorship and Supervision, the authors focused mainly on the oldest and biggest universities in the country; Makerere University, Kyambogo University, Gulu University and Mbarara University of Science and Technology(MUST) and left out the younger and private universities since they would not provide as much data as Makerere University and other public universities would.

### **Methods of Evaluating the Output of the Meta-Analysis**

The independent variables were mentorship and supervision while the dependent variable was career development of both students and academic staff in higher education / universities. Data were obtained

from meta-analysis of documents such as reports, journals, articles and books concerning mentorship and supervision.

### **Statistical Analysis**

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean score analysis) for each variable and thereafter, the overall mean score was got to determine the influence of mentorship and supervision on the career development of both students and academic staff in higher education / universities. The overall mean score for the influence was 2.5 which indicates a low influence of mentorship and supervision on the career. The implication is that more efforts need to be put on the mentorship and supervision among Universities' staff and students as a way of guiding new academic staff and newly admitted students. Similarly, supervisors-supervisees relationships need to be improved to achieve higher graduate study completion rates.

### **Situation on Ground**

From the perspective of a typical graduate student, lack of supervision, isolation in work environment, the supervisee being treated as a slave, over assumption on the part of supervisor by implying to the supervisee that they are a god, using appeal for pity method to exploit the supervisee and monetary demand factors are significant barriers to completion to study (Wright and Cochrane, 2000). Understanding good graduate degree supervision practices, including appropriate matching of supervisors with candidates, the benefits of a hands-on approach, and guidance with constructive criticism and encouragement, will help more students attain graduate degrees timely.

### **Understanding the Nitty-Gritty in Mentoring and Supervision**

Faculty members are expected to produce research in most universities, and supervising, mentoring can help boost one's scholarship portfolio (Kyambogo University Student Brochure, 2019). However, candidates may not be requesting supervision for the best reasons and potential supervisors may need to be selective. Bettman (2009), observes that although research is driven by data, choosing a research topic and mentor are almost completely based on opinion. Knowledge of a candidate's capabilities and personality are important. A supervisor should meet with a candidate face-to-face, or if supervising long distance, via video conference to discuss the candidate's previous work as well as career goals.

Understanding a candidate's career goals will help guide a supervisor's decision, as well as the candidate's best options along the way (Hill and Walsh, 2010). For instance, if a potential candidate ultimately would like a career in government, making health policy decisions, then a supervisor with experience only in academia or industry may not be the best match. Sometimes, however, co-supervision can be a viable option if a specialist's knowledge area matches the candidate's project well. This raises the point that all parties should understand everyone's role from the outset. There may be several people involved, including supervisors with different strengths, members of a research team and research assistants. Full and clear communication about the makeup and function of everyone involved in a graduate degree candidacy may help avoid confusion, wasted time and anxiety. A good supervisor should carefully explain all this to a candidate and it has been noted that formalization of this process is advantageous.

A supervisor may encourage a strong undergraduate to continue on an academic track as one of his or her candidates, or occasionally an organization may take the initiative. It has been found that access to

experienced researchers is important to a candidate's success (Ismail et. al., 2011). This creates the dilemma of newly credentialed PhDs having difficulty gaining experience, and experience is a major criterion for good supervision. This problem may be overcome with co-supervision. Co-supervision has myriad advantages (James and Baldwin, 2006). It involves the blending of individual strengths. For instance, a particular supervisor may be a good writer, and another may have a record of obtaining grants. Or one supervisor may have great technical strengths and another may be exceptional at inter-personal communication, facilitating the acquisition of the technical skills by the candidate. In one of the author's own experience as a current graduate degree candidate, two official supervisors with credentials in the broad field of study are required by the university. For advice specific to the chosen topic, he also contacted 2 international experts in the topic and asked if they would be happy to give their advice periodically over the course of the candidacy. They assented, and the author refers to them as "specialist content advisors." With new methods of electronic communication, distance supervision can be just as effective as local guidance. Some institutions maintain a database of potential supervisors with varied degrees of experience and interests to help connect candidates with appropriate supervisors.

### **Creating a Conducive Environment for Mentoring and Supervision**

Candidates can be devastated by a negative word at the wrong time, so supervisors should always be constructive with criticism. They should make positive statements about a candidate's work when appropriate (Rowarth and Cornforth, 2005). Candidates should be encouraged to write early and often, a habit associated with a higher completion rate (Sinclair, 2004). Since the end product of a graduate degree is a sizeable piece of writing, and good writing takes practice, it is beneficial for the candidate to engage the writing process early. It is sometimes helpful for the candidate to try to obtain some early victories; sometimes papers, such as a literature reviews, can be derived from components of the overall process. Publications along the way are rewards; an acceptance to a prestigious (or, indeed, nearly any) journal is a real boost to motivation.

Supervising a graduate degree candidate is a long-term relationship and life will intrude. Candidates and supervisors alike may get married, have deaths in the family, or experience other events that can delay or derail the process. Supervisors should be aware of this and make sure that candidates are aware, too. Again, they should allow flexibility to deal with these issues (Rowarth and Cornforth, 2005). If difficulties of any kind arise, supervisors should give advice on how the candidate may receive assistance. Supervisors may, for instance, advise on how to suspend studies in the event of life difficulties, how to approach a journal editor who is not timely with responses, or even which is the best coffee shop in town to sit for hours editing a paper.

It should be noted here that just following these suggestions is not sufficient for good research mentoring. It is rather an enhancement of a process that will include many other factors, such as having sufficient facilities to properly support candidates, having sufficient finances in place or experience with obtaining research grants, holding a degree that is at least at the level of that which the candidate is working toward, or being part of a supervisory team in which at least some members hold that degree.

### **The Ideal Mentoring Process at Ugandan Higher Education Institutions**

Mentoring and supervision is a welcome ideal situation all over the world, because individual grow up from different families that monitor in development process of everyone. As mentoring is already defined, it is

a long standing form of training, learning and development and increasing important tool for supporting personal development. Mentoring is a widespread development tool in organizations and institutions such as universities. Anyone can be a mentor if they have something to pass on and the skills, time and commitment to do it (Cutterbuck, 2004). This, in the case of the university implies that colleagues can mentor each other at the teaching, research and community service conducted by the university as its core functions. The senior colleague at a university, be he/she a Professor, Senior Lecturer, Lecturer, Assistant Lecturer Senior Administrator, could be a mentor or mentee depending on the particular area of mentorship.

The researchers therefore argue that one can be mentored a colleague much younger in chronological age. Mentoring at university entails long time passing on of support, guidance and advice. The underlying factor in mentoring in the work place is that the more experienced colleague uses their greater knowledge and understanding of the work or workplace to support the development of a more junior or inexperienced member of staff.

In other words, mentorship at the university is a form of apprenticeship whereby the inexperienced learner learns the tricks of trade from an experienced colleague, backed up as in modern apprenticeship by off-site training. Mentoring at the university should be of benefit to the individual first but resulting to immense benefits to the institution (Cutterbuck, 2004).

The following are the characteristics of mentoring at the university:

- i) It should essentially be a supportive form of development
- ii) It should focus on assisting the employee to manage their career and improve their skills
- iii) Personal issues can be discussed more productively unlike in coaching where the focus is on performance at work
- iv) It should have both personal and university goals

The university benefits from mentoring in the following ways:

- i) Has a significant impact upon recruitment and retention
- ii) Provides effective succession planning
- iii) Makes the University adapt to change
- iv) Increases productivity through better engagement and job satisfaction.

### **The Ideal Supervision Process at Ugandan Higher Education Institutions**

Supervision is a way of stimulating, guiding, refreshing, encouraging and overseeing a certain group with the hope of seeking their cooperation in order for the supervisors to be successful in their task of supervision (Ogusanju, 1983). It is essentially the practice of monitoring the performance of university staff, noting the merit and demerits and using befitting and amicable techniques to ameliorate the flaws while still improving on the merits thereby increasing the standard of schools and achieving university goals. The term supervision is derived from word "Super video" meaning to oversee (Adepoju, 1998). It is an interaction between at least two persons for the improvement of an activity. It is also a combination or integration of processes, procedures and conditions that are consciously designed to advance the work effectiveness of individuals and group. Adepoju (1998) defines school supervision as the process of bringing about improvement in instruction by working with people who are working with pupils. It has also been described as a process of stimulating growth and a means of helping teachers to achieve excellence in teaching. Supervision in the

university therefore is a vital process and combination of activities which is concerned with the teaching and improvement of the teaching in the university framework.

### **Basic Principles of Supervision at Ugandan Higher Education Institutions**

Recently, the one of the authors was afforded the opportunity to more closely consider practices of graduate research supervision and reflect on them in comparison to his own experiences as a graduate degree candidate and as a research supervisor.

The principles run as follows:

#### **I. Healthy Atmosphere**

The environment should be made free of tension and emotional stress. The atmosphere should be given incentives for work.

#### **II. Staff Orientation**

The quality and quantity of the work must be specified in clean clear terms. Staff should be made to understand clearly what is or not expected of them. New staff must be given the necessary orientation. They should have a schedule to know where to get information and materials to help them perform the work satisfactorily well(Onasanya, 2009).

#### **III. Guidance and Staff Training**

Staff should be offered necessary guidance. They should be guided on how to carry out the assignment, standard should be set by the supervisor while information should be given ruling out the possibility of rumours. Information should be for everybody and specific to individuals assigned to a particular task. Techniques of how to do it must be given at all times. The university must always arrange and participate in staff training (ibid).

#### **IV. Immediate Recognition of Good Work**

Good work should be recognized. This implies that the acknowledgement of any good work done must be immediate and made public to others which will then serve as incentive to others. Incentive of merit, recommendation for promotion and such actions improve performance. (ibid).

#### **V. Constructive Criticisms**

Poor work done should be constructively criticized. Advice and personal relationship should be given to the affected staff. It needs be stated here that such criticisms should be made private and with mind free of bias (ibid).

#### **VI. Opportunity for Improvement**

University staff should be given opportunity to prove their worth and for aspiring higher. They should therefore be allowed to use their initiatives in performing their jobs and taking decision .It will give them the motivation to work much harder (ibid).

#### **VII. Motivation and Encouragement**

Staff should be motivated and encouraged to work to increase their productivity. They should be encouraged to improve their ability to achieve university goals. (ibid)

### **Current Status of Mentorship at Ugandan Higher Education Institutions**

In Uganda Universities, the level of mentorship is very low. Part of the reason is that the staff to mentor and to be mentored are really thin on the ground. This means that the senior staff are inadequate and over-stretched to the extent that even if they wished to mentor anybody, there is simply no time to do so. On the

other hand, there are very few who staff of junior cadre to mentor that is if they are willing to be mentored. In fact, it appears to the authors that the concept of mentorship at the majorities of Ugandan Universities are either ignored or not understood by a majority of the way they would be mentors. In some cases, the mentee is better qualified academically and older than they would be mentor who is his/her superior so there is no mentorship that takes place. There is also clearly no willingness of the mentor to do their job and that of the mentee to be mentored. At the Ugandan most of the universities, recruitment of staff at the various levels has not been done to fill the university staff structure so many gaps exist at the level of Professor, Associate Professor, Senior Lecturer, Lecturer etc. Even at the biggest and oldest university in the country; Makerere University, only about 60% of the academic positions are filled. This means that mentorship cannot effectively occur.

### Challenges in Mentoring and Supervision at Ugandan Higher Education Institutions

The following challenges in mentoring and supervision:

- I. Poor remuneration of lecturers, most of them are not on the government payroll and are employed on part-time basis
- II. Insufficient staffing/shortage of supervisors
- III. Weak supervisors who are not on the ground or fear to report incompetent staff, or have a laissez fare attitude to their supervision role
- IV. Lack of adequate facilities, materials and resources for the supervisors of teaching staff to work with e.g. vehicles, whiteboards, projectors, e.g laptops, internet connectivity and projectors offices and teaching space etc.
- V. Poor time management even by the supervisors which does not provide a good example to the supervisees
- VI. Weak evaluation systems-the Quality Assurance Units are understaffed and only make occasional visits to the faculties
- VII. Poor funding of the supervision units making it impossible to analyse information gathered during staff supervision. Most Quality Assurance Units in Ugandan universities are limping financially.
- VIII. Negative attitude to supervision and supervisors by teaching and non-teaching staff.
- IX. Poor record keeping at the department and faculty levels.

### Conclusion

There are many challenges to completing a graduate degree. From an institutional perspective, readers are encouraged to consider embarking on a graduate research degree or to take on candidates to supervise. Individuals are encouraged to attend inter-professional conferences and cross-disciplinary meetings to learn the language and practices of researchers. Private chiropractic teaching institutions are encouraged to form links with other tertiary institutions that have similar research interests.

This commentary is not meant to be a comprehensive treatment of all aspects of research supervision and mentoring, but rather a summary of the salient points the authors took away from a recent reflection exercise on the topic. Interested parties who would like more in-depth knowledge are invited to read the papers referenced as well as many others that are not included here. It is hoped that the issues dealt with in this paper act as a stimulus for consideration and conversation. This does not mark the end of the discussion but just the beginning because of the importance of the topic.

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